

# Supporting Quality Control of Study Reviews in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)

April 2024

# Road map for this webinar

- Introduction and learning objectives
- A brief overview of WWC quality control activities
- How to provide high-quality documentation in reviews
- Common issues in reviews and how to address them



**Dr. Chris Weiss**  
Principal Researcher  
Mathematica



**Adam Dunn**  
Senior Researcher  
Mathematica

# Who is this training for, and what are the learning objectives?

- This webinar is intended for reviewers, reconcilers, and quality assurance reviewers who conduct study reviews.
- This training aims to support you and help you...
  - Know what to expect from WWC quality control activities after completing a review.
  - Be able to access resources and use the information provided in this webinar to complete reviews that meet and exceed quality expectations.

# Overview of WWC Quality Control Activities

# Overview: The role of quality control

WWC staff conduct quality control activities to promote the **quality and consistency of study reviews.**

Quality control activities **identify opportunities to...**

- Make corrections to study reviews.
- Update materials to support reviewers.





# Highlights of quality control activities



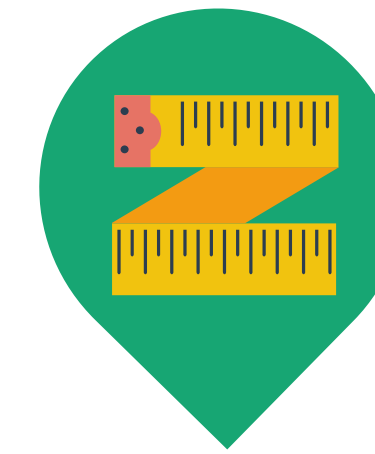
## Peer review

- **What:** *In-depth checks* of all study reviews that meet standards
- **When:** At the time contractors submit completed study reviews and before they are published to the WWC



## Study review audits

- **What:** *Re-reviews* of a random sample of study reviews
- **When:** Sampled from study reviews published to the WWC several times during the year



## Other quality control activities

- Checks for consistency of data from study reviews
- Other corrections to data from study reviews

# Goals of peer review and study review audits

These quality control activities help confirm that a study review is accurate and complete so that it can be used by the public and included in WWC products and syntheses.

## Peer review and audits...

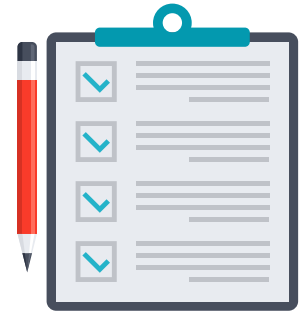
- Verify that the review team appropriately applied the standards and procedures to arrive at the correct rating and disposition for a study review and its findings.
- Confirm that the findings and data entered are accurate and complete and reflect the source study manuscripts and author query materials.
- Assess the accuracy of the context and narrative sections of the study review.



Peer reviewers and auditors focus on the accuracy of the review rather than editorial guidance on the narrative sections of the review. The WWC provides examples online of how to write accessible narrative sections using plain language, which we'll touch on in this webinar.



# Peer review



## Highlight

*All study reviews that meet standards are peer reviewed, regardless of whether they are included in a product, such as a practice guide. Peer reviewers examine original reviewers' entries in the study review guide and source documents.*

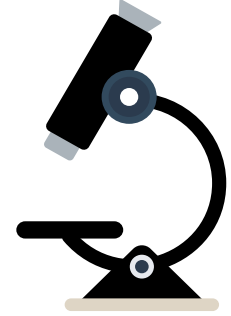
## Peer reviewers:

- Closely examine every field in a review's study review guide but do not re-review studies.
- Check reviewers' logic and justifications using master review notes and measure notes.
- Reference study manuscripts and author query materials, in addition to the Handbook, Study Review Protocol, and any synthesis protocol.





# Study review audits



## Highlight

Audits are independent *re-reviews* of studies. Audits are done on a rolling basis for a sample of all study reviews recently published to the WWC.

## How do audits differ from peer review?

- Although the goals are similar, audits are re-reviews of studies, while peer reviews are not.
- Auditors re-review recent studies published to the WWC and compare the results to the original review.
- Audits are mainly used to identify training needs and areas of confusion but also identify errors in the original reviews.



# How is this information helpful for my WWC work?



**Peer reviewers and auditors** help the WWC produce high-quality reviews that the public can use and trust.

Now that you know what to expect from these WWC quality control activities, you are better prepared to submit reviews that meet or exceed WWC quality expectations.



# How Can Reviewers Provide High-Quality Documentation in Their Reviews?

# How can reviewers produce high-quality reviews?

- The primary goal of peer review and study review audits is to confirm that a study review is accurate and complete.
- High-quality study reviews are essential to support the accuracy and transparency of the WWC.
- To promote study quality, we have developed and released a new resource in the User Guide for the online study review guide (SRG).
  - <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/UserGuide>
- **Appendix F: Study Review Documentation and Narrative Guidelines**

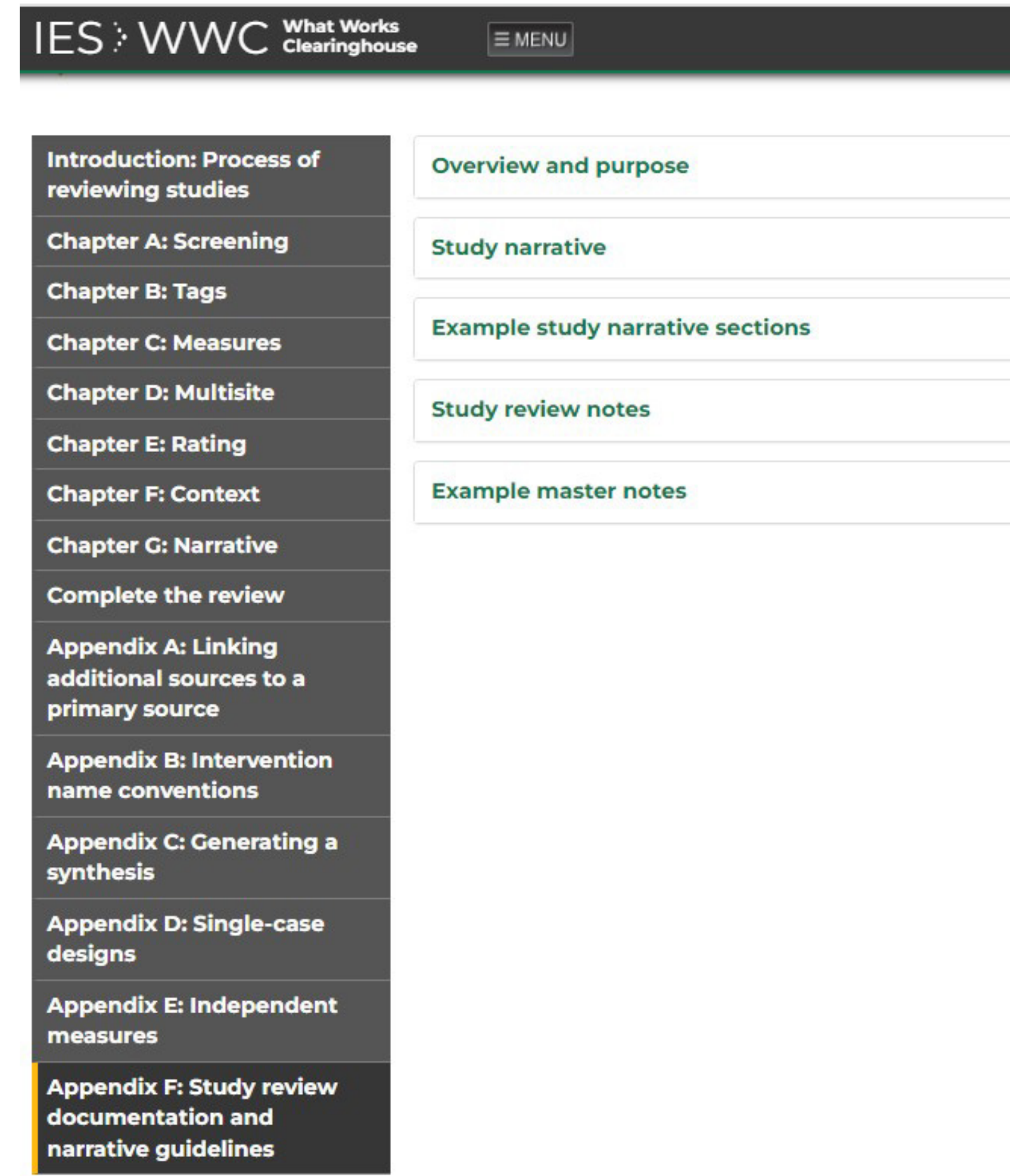


# New guidelines for reviewers

Appendix F is part of the online SRG User Guide.

It provides guidance to reviewers on two core elements of a study review:

- Completing the **Study Narrative** page.
- Using the reviews' **Study Review Notes** section of the SRG.



IES WWC What Works Clearinghouse MENU	
Introduction: Process of reviewing studies	Overview and purpose
Chapter A: Screening	Study narrative
Chapter B: Tags	
Chapter C: Measures	Example study narrative sections
Chapter D: Multisite	
Chapter E: Rating	Study review notes
Chapter F: Context	
Chapter G: Narrative	Example master notes
Complete the review	
Appendix A: Linking additional sources to a primary source	
Appendix B: Intervention name conventions	
Appendix C: Generating a synthesis	
Appendix D: Single-case designs	
Appendix E: Independent measures	
Appendix F: Study review documentation and narrative guidelines	



# Study narrative

- The study narrative is the text of the “Study Details” section of a WWC study page.
- For studies that meet WWC standards, most fields on the Study Narrative page are public.
- Important that text on these pages is high quality and accessible to a broad audience.
- Note – please do not copy directly from the study text.



## WWC REVIEW OF THIS STUDY



### Should Students Assessed as Needing Remedial Mathematics Take College-Level Quantitative Courses Instead? A Randomized Controlled Trial

Logue, A. W.; Watanabe-Rose, Mari; Douglas, Daniel (2016). Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, v38 n3 p578-598. Retrieved from: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1108392>

RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL EXAMINING 610 STUDENTS, GRADE PS

Review Details Findings Sample Characteristics **Study Details** Additional Sources

#### Setting

The study was conducted at three City University of New York (CUNY) community colleges, one in each of three NYC boroughs: the Bronx, Queens and Manhattan.

#### Study sample

Across all three groups, 55% of students were female (55% in Stat-WS, 58% in EA-WS, and 51% in EA), and 86% of students were underrepresented minorities (84% in Stat-WS, 88% in EA-WS, and 87% in EA). In each of the three groups, the majority of students (56%) reported that their first language was English. The average age of study participants was 21 years old.

#### Intervention Group

The intervention (Stat-WS) was a mainstream, credit-bearing, college-level introductory statistics course (Stat-WS), delivered in the fall of 2013. Course topics included probability, binomial probability distributions, normal distributions, confidence intervals, and hypothesis testing. The course was held over one semester and lasted between 3 and 6 hours per week, depending on the college. The course required students to attend a two-hour workshop every week for supplemental instruction on statistical concepts and problems. The workshops had three components: (1) 10-15 minutes of reflection on concepts learned so far and what was difficult; (2) about 100 minutes of individual and group work on difficult topics and problems, and (3) a final five minutes of reflection on whether the difficult issues were addressed or not. The 24 class sections that included workshops were taught by 21 workshop leaders, who were either advanced undergraduates or recent graduates of CUNY.



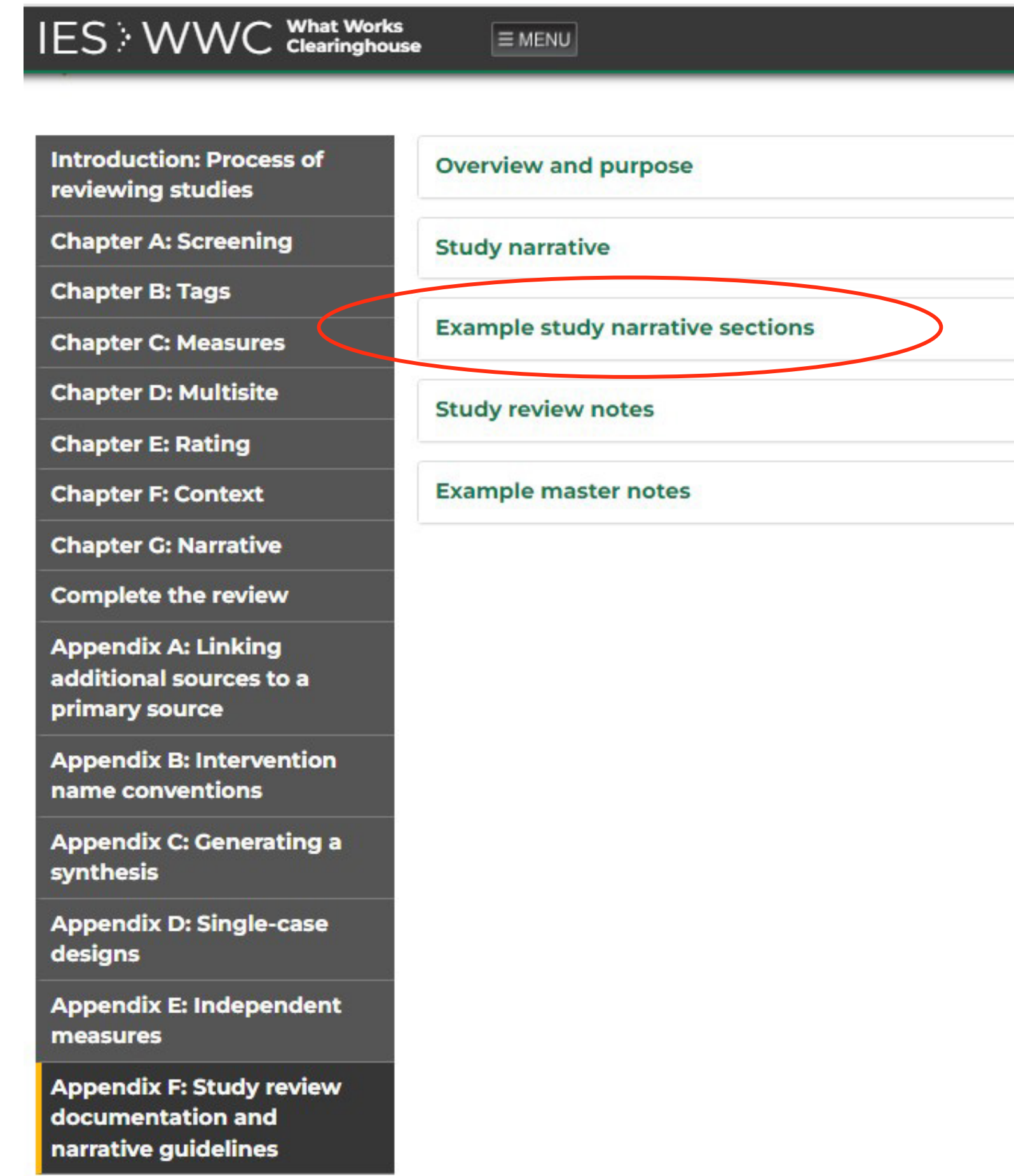
# Specific guidelines for each section of the narrative

For example, in the intervention group field:

- Provide a brief, high-level description of the intervention and its purpose.
- Add details about intervention's content and main components.
- Describe how the intervention was implemented in the study, including duration and dosage.
- Be concise and focus on essential details that help readers understand what the intervention is.

# Example narrative

- The new appendix also contains an example of how the study narrative guidelines were applied in a fictional study review.
- Example provides a brief description of the intervention in the study.



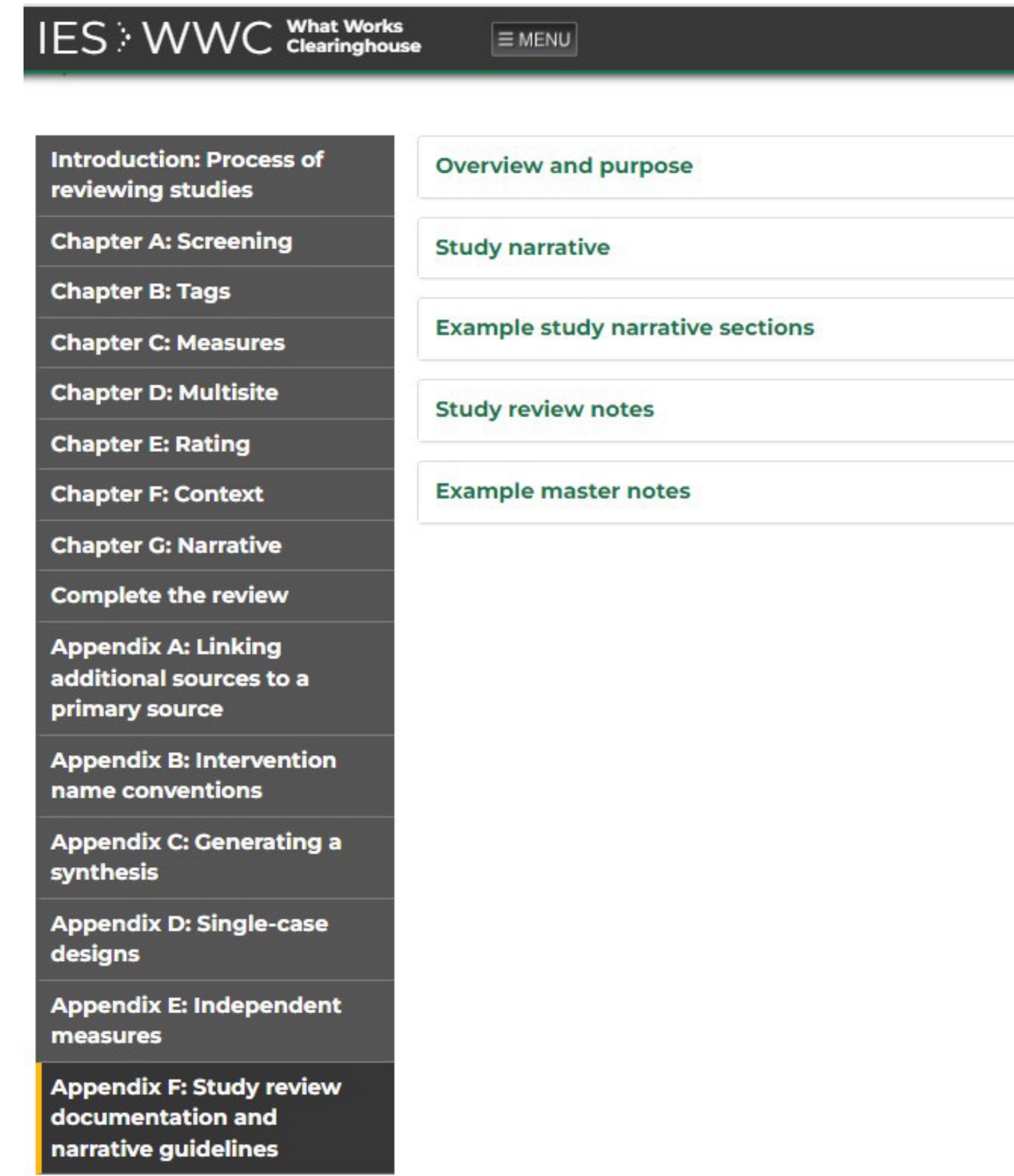
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# Study review notes

- Fourth section of Appendix F – study review notes.
- Review notes are essential to:
  - Future WWC review teams.
  - Quality assurance and peer reviewers.
  - Other IES or WWC staff.
- Key to helping others understand and trust the results of a review.



The screenshot shows the IES WWC What Works Clearinghouse website. The top navigation bar includes the IES WWC logo and a 'MENU' button. Below the navigation bar is a vertical list of document sections on the left, and a horizontal list of document sections on the right. The 'Study review notes' section is highlighted in both lists.

Document Section	Document Section
Introduction: Process of reviewing studies	Overview and purpose
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# Specific guidelines for each notes field

- Appendix F includes guidelines to help reviewers complete their review notes.
- Provides strategies to streamline reviewers' work:
  - How to avoid duplicating information across sections of the review.
  - Focus on details crucial to helping others understand your review.
- Guidelines for measure notes.

## Master notes

### Overview

- If there are multiple reasons a study received a rating, describe those reasons here. The rating disposition lists only one reason, so teams can use this section of the review notes to document the full set of reasons at a high level. For example, a QED might be rated Does Not Meet Standards because of both an unknown baseline difference and a confounding factor.
- In general, this section should focus on the overall study rating, rather than any differences in the rating across findings within the review.

### Citation

- List all publicly available primary and related sources that were examined in the review, aside from the primary citation, and summarize the information that each contributed to the review.
- If the manuscript or group of manuscripts includes multiple WWC studies reviewed separately, please note here that additional findings are reviewed in a separate OSRG. Please also briefly justify the decision to review these as separate studies, such as by explaining that each review focuses on a unique intervention or referring to specific criteria in the definition of a study provided on pages 20–21 of the WWC Handbook.

### Handbook and protocol

Document justifications for any decisions about the eligibility of the study where the review team might have made a judgment call. It is not necessary to justify other eligibility decisions.

### Design

Describe the study design at a high level, including the approach used to form groups, the unit of assignment, and any significant design features or flaws.

### Confounding factors

Describe any confounding factors in the study.

# How is this information helpful for my WWC work?



**Review notes** support transparency by documenting and describing decisions, identifying the location of information, and explaining how information was used.

**Narrative sections** support audiences in understanding, interpreting, and using evidence in a study.

**Appendix F of the SRG User Guide** contains guidelines to help you provide high-quality documentation in your reviews.



# Addressing Common Issues in Reviews' Documentation



## #1: Justify crucial decisions in study review notes

After you complete your review, confirm that you have justified decisions you made in your review in your **master review notes** and **measure notes**.

Tips: *all reviews*

- Explain domain placement of outcome measures when not obvious.
- Document data sources for measures, including a page or table number.
- Justify your selection of “official” values for statistical significance and effect size.

Tips: *5.0 version reviews*

- Justify the attrition boundary you select for a randomized controlled trial.
- Justify the independence or non-independence of a measure.



## #2: Document and attach author query materials

Reviewers should confirm they've completed these **two steps** before submitting a review with an author query.

### Step 1

- Describe the information that you queried for in your study notes.
- Summarize the author's response to the query and how it contributed to the review.



### Step 2

- Attach author query materials to the review through the **author query portal**.





## #3: Identify if a study is multisite

Identify whether a study is a **multisite** study following the guidance in Chapter D of the User Guide.

- **Where is this documented?** The Multisite page of the version 5.0 online study review guide.
- **Key criterion:** Conducted in more than one state, district, school, or campus



## #4: Assign intervention names appropriately

Guidance differs for assigning **intervention names for branded and nonbranded interventions**. Follow the guidance in Appendix B of the User Guide:

- First check to make sure an existing entry in the intervention names database is not suitable.
- If you determine that an intervention is nonbranded, you should assign an intervention name in the format:

*Intervention description in sentence case—First author et al. (Year).*

*Example: Peer tutoring in remedial mathematics—Rose et al. (2023).*



# Wrap-Up

# Resources

## **Guidelines for submitting studies to peer review:**

- Your Contracting Officer's Representative can provide your review team with guidelines for submitting studies for peer review to support quick and efficient reviews.

## **Guidelines for completing study notes and narratives in reviews:**

- [User Guide](#) (Appendix F: Study review documentation and narrative guidelines)

## **Questions and answers about the WWC procedures and standards:**

- [Questions and Answers about the \*WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Version 5.0\*](#)
- [User Guide](#) (Appendix G: Additional guidance about WWC standards and procedures)



# Thank you for your interest in this webinar!

- If you have any questions about the WWC, quality control activities, or suggestions, you can contact the WWC Help Desk (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/help>) or email [Contact.WWC@ed.gov](mailto:Contact.WWC@ed.gov).
- Staff currently working on WWC contracts can email the WWC Contractor Help Desk for support or to provide feedback about quality control activities.